Marcin Walczyński
University of Wrocław

Creoloids and the Typology
of Contact Languages

1. Introduction

In this paper I attempt to define creoloids – languages which emerge as a result of contacts between (at least) two communities whose linguistic backgrounds vary. The issue of creoloids has not been touched upon by linguists in Poland and therefore I am of the opinion that it is important to cast some light on those languages because they are very interesting linguistic phenomena.

In the first part of this paper, I discuss three types of contact languages: pidgins, creoles and bilingual-mixed languages. Then I provide the most crucial characteristics of creoloids. In the final part of this article, I try to argue why creoloids should be deemed a typological category of contact languages.

2. Contact languages

A branch of linguistics which deals with various aspects of contact languages is called *contact linguistics*. Since time immemorial people of different linguistic backgrounds have come into contact with one another. In many cases they did not speak the same language nor did they know any other tongue which could be mutually understood by them. Therefore, such contacts often resulted in the formation of other languages whose primary function was to bridge the gap of an understandable means of verbal communication. Those newly-formed tongues were frequently based on the first languages spoken by the interacting communities who, having a strong need to communicate with each other, tended to mix their mother tongues. Such linguistic mixtures are the subjects of studies for contact linguists who, depending on various characteristic features of those systems, have called them *pidgins*, *creoles* or *bilingual-mixed languages*.

2.1. Pidgins

A pidgin (or pidginised) language is usually defined as:

> [a] new and initially simple form of language that arises out of language contact between two or more groups of people who do not share a common language. […] Furthermore, it is not spoken as a native language by anyone. As social solutions to the problem of communication, especially in trade- and labour-related contexts, pidgins have norms of their own, frequently making maximum use of minimal grammatical resources. (Swann et al. 2004: 238)

As quoted above, a pidgin is a language which emerged as a result of contacts between at least two groups who had no common means of communication. Those contacts were primarily of business character. One group – the dominating one – came to make business with the other group – the dominated one. The dominating group spoke a language which is called *superstrate* (or *lexifier*) (and it contributed to a new pidgin by donating its lexis) whereas the dominated group used a tongue (or tongues) which gave a new pidgin its grammatical structure; this language (or languages) is (are) usually referred to as *substrate*.

Furthermore, pidgins were also the results of enslaving members of different (predominantly African) speech communities who, when transported or made to work together, needed some means of communication. They, as a consequence, worked out various pidgins which were mixtures of those slaves' native languages.

Formed either in business or slavery situations, pidgins have no native speakers and for all pidgin users pidginised tongues are the second/third languages which are usually learnt and not acquired. This is strictly connected with a very limited range of functions which these languages are applied to. Their basic role is to make people of different linguistic origins communicate simple messages in very rudimentary situations such as exchanging goods (as was the case in the Pacific region – where Europeans travelled in search of new natural resources, bringing at the same time some products which were bartered for copra, pearls etc.) or helping each other on plantations (where slaves laboured). The simplicity of pidgin grammar and vocabulary, however, does not refrain the pidgin from developing into a more complex language in terms of its structure and functions. A pidginised language can evolve into a stable pidgin; then it can develop into an expanded pidgin (sometimes also known as a *pidgincreole* (cf. Bakker 2008, forthcoming). An expanded pidgin can further develop and as a consequence of such development, a creole may come into being.

Many pidgin languages arose in the context of European colonisation of such areas as Asia, Oceania, Africa etc. Such pidgins were based on one of the European languages (e.g. English, German, French, Dutch, Portuguese), which contributed its vocabulary, and the local tongues used by the indigenous people. The list of pidgin languages is quite long and includes such names as Tok Pisin (or Neomelanesian Pidgin English; English-based pidgin spoken in Papua New

Guinea), Chinese Pidgin English, Hawaiian Pidgin English, Pidgin German (in the past spoken in Papua New Guinea), New Caledonian Pidgin French, New Hebrides Pidgin French, West African Pidgin Portuguese and many more (cf. e.g. Arends, Muysken, Smith 1995; Holm 1988).

2.2. Creoles

Creole languages are often the results of developmental processes which pidgins undergo. Sarah G. Thomason states that (2001: 159):

> [a] creole […] is the native language of a speech community. Like pidgins, creoles develop in contact situations that typically involve more than two languages; also like pidgins, they typically draw their lexicon, but not their grammar, primarily from a single language, the lexifier language.

In contrast to pidgins, creole languages are more developed both in form and function. The most important feature is, however, the fact that creoles have their native speakers. Pidgin-speaking parents who rear their children with this pidgin as a medium of upbringing contribute to the development of a creole language because the younger generation begins to use this language as their mother tongue. Thus, the pidgin users' children by speaking their parents' second/third language turn it into their first language and, at the same time, expand it because they need to express themselves in this system in a much wider range of domains. In such a way, a pidgin undergoes expansion, thanks to which its offspring – a creole – is used in public institutions, in the media, in education, in politics etc. What is more, it can serve well to fulfil phatic, metalinguistic and interactional functions (McMahon 1994).

The process of creole formation is known as *creolisation*. It can proceed according to one of the three patterns. The first one starts with a jargon (understood as a rudimentary pidgin) as an initial stage and develops directly into a creole. An example of this type of creolisation is West Indian English Creole (Romaine 1994). The second type of creolisation involves three stages: a jargon, a (stabilised) pidgin and a creole. Torres Strait Creole developed in this way. The third pattern, according to which a pidginised language can go through creolisation, involves four phases: a jargon, a stabilised pidgin, an expanded pidgin (when pidgin form and functions become more advanced), and finally, a creole (cf. e.g. Mühlhäusler 1997, Romaine 2000). The creolised form of Tok Pisin, spoken in Papua New Guinea typifies best this model of creolisation.

What should be emphasised, however, is that the distinction between a pidgin and a creole is rarely an easy task because in a given region there may be a number of varieties of what is sometimes considered to be one language. Such an instance is observable in Papua New Guinea where Tok Pisin in some areas is regarded as a pidgin (because it is still only an additional language) whereas in some other places of Papua New Guinea it has already undergone creolisation and serves many more functions than initially. It would be therefore right to claim that Tok

Pisin can be described in terms of a creole continuum – a kind of a matrix where all varieties of a given pidgin/creole can be placed (e.g. Holm 2000). The term *creole continuum* is based on the notion of *dialect continuum*. The varieties of a given pidginised/creolised language are located in different points of the creole continuum depending on the degree of similarity to the superstrate language.

The creole continuum is inseparably connected with the process of decreolisation (the transformation of a creole into what eventually may become a variety of the superstrate language) which occurs when creole speakers have constant access to the superstrate language. The most "creolised" variety of a given creole ("deep creole"), which differs most from its superstrate, is called *basilect* and the form which is most similar to the superstrate is called *acrolect*. All the intermediate varieties are known as *mesolects* (e.g. De Rooij 1995). Like the majority of languages, creoles are not homogenous entities which are lexically, grammatically and functionally the same in a given area. They *do* have their own varieties and that is why the concept of the creole continuum is very useful while describing these languages.

2.3. Bilingual-mixed languages

Bilingual-mixed languages are another category which is included in the typology of contact languages. These languages are also referred to as *intertwined languages* (e.g. Bakker and Muysken 1995). A bilingual-mixed language is "[…] a special type of bilingual mixed code which draws on one language for its lexical morphemes and another for its grammatical morphemes" (Swann et al. 2004: 154). In other words, an intertwined language, in extreme cases, is a system which is composed of the elements taken from two other languages: vocabulary comes from one system and grammar (i.e. phonology, morphology and syntax) is taken from the other.

Linguists studying bilingual-mixed languages (e.g. Bakker and Muysken 1995, Thomason 2001) point to a very interesting social condition under which a bilingual-mixed language may develop. They state that the speakers of bilingual-mixed languages, who live in bilingual communities where at least two tongues are spoken and who come into contact with the members of the other speech community, do not need to form a new contact language because they already have at least one shared (with the other group) means of verbal communication. That means that the primary aim of such intertwined languages is not to function as lingua francas, thanks to which mutual communication between the speakers belonging to two different speech communities could be possible. Hence bilingual-mixed languages are created for a totally different purpose. Sarah G. Thomason puts it neatly and says that (2001: 198):

> […] [bilingual] mixed languages arise […] within a single social or ethnic group because of
> a desire, or perhaps, even a need, for an in-group language. All members of the group already
> speak at least one language that is used as a medium of communication with the other group(s)

in the contact situation and that could be used for all in-group communicative functions as well. The new mixed language is likely to serve one of the two functions – keeping group members' conversations secret from the other group(s), or being an identity symbol of an ethnic or subethinic group within a speech community.

As stated by Thomason, bilingual-mixed languages are created to make the other speech community members unable to understand the language which is used within one group. The other reason is connected with a group identity which is expressed, in this case, by means of a separate language.

A good example of bilingual-mixed languages is Anglo-Romani – a speech of Gypsies living in English-speaking countries such as Great Britain, Australia and the United States. This tongue is used as a secret means of communication among Anglo-Romani speech community members for whom English is a mother tongue (ibid.). As for the structure of this system, it is composed of lexical items derived from the Romani language (although many English elements are present) whereas grammar is English.

Another interesting case is Michif – a bilingual-mixed language spoken in southern parts of Canada (Manitoba and Saskatechwan) and in northern regions of the United States (Montana and North Dakota). It can be generally said that Michif is formed of French vocabulary and Cree grammar. Some speakers of Michif may know also Canadian French (the Canadian variety) or Cree (a system belonging to Algonquian language family), however, all of them are fluent in English (e.g. Thomason 2001). The use of Michif, which is a traditional language of this speech community (called *Métis*), is related to the expression of this group identity.[1]

Bilingual-mixed languages are the third category of tongues whose emergence is connected with situations involving contacts between two (or more) different speech communities.

3. Creoloids

3.1. Characteristic features of creoloids

Creoloids are relatively unknown linguistic phenomena and in linguistic literature there is not much information on this type of languages. The first linguist to write on creoloids was John Platt who, while researching Singapore English, noticed that this language existed in a number of varieties. Those forms could be easily located on the creole continuum and the most striking variety was one of the basilects which he called *Singlish*. The need for a new linguistic term for Singlish – that is *creoloid* – resulted from the fact that this variety, although having a few characteristic features of creole languages, was not a creole and, what is more, it was quite different from English.

---

[1] For a full discussion of Michif, see, e.g. Bakker 1997.

It is sometimes claimed that the concept of *creoloid* is not needed because, in Holm's words (2000: 10), it "has been used for so many different kinds of vaguely creole-like languages that its usefulness has become rather limited […]". I am of the opinion, however, that this notion is quite useful and helpful while making an attempt to classify creole-like languages. Such classification is only possible when the criteria proposed by Platt are taken into consideration. Platt's set of creoloid features includes the following (Platt and Platt 1975: 110):

1. It has similar structural variables to post-creoles based on the same language.
2. It did not develop from a pidgin but by some other process.
3. It developed from the transference of features into the "standard" language from the languages of *several*[2] (sometimes unrelated) ethic groups.
4. The superordinate language is usually only *one* of the official languages.
5. It is used as *one* of several "native" languages by the speech community.
6. It is usually also used as a lingua franca in interethnic group communication within the speech community where it is one of the sub-varieties.

A major distinction between creoles and creoloids is that the latter emerge not through the process of creolisation but in a different way. Creoloids are usually formed by speakers who transfer the features of their mother tongues into the language which is a standard in a given country. A good case in point is abovementioned Singlish. English, from which Singlish emerged, was adopted in Singapore in the era of colonisation as the language of instruction at the primary and secondary level. Later, it became a language of everyday conversations among the inhabitants of Singapore who were mainly the speakers of Malay, Chinese and Indian languages. Thus, they transferred the features of their mother tongues into English (which was the major and official language used in Singapore), which led to the formation of the creoloid – Singlish. What should be mentioned here is the fact that the type of the variety of English spoken in Singapore – Singlish – has not been unanimously called *creoloid*. In the literature on this topic, there are many terms used with reference to this language (*creoloid*, *new English*, *indigenised English*, *Singapore Colloquial English* (Zhiming 2008)).

The other example, although being much debated, is Afrikaans spoken in South Africa. The history of this language is quite complicated and this is why the status of Afrikaans is still widely discussed. The fact which would enable linguists to categorise Afrikaans as a creoloid is that in the past there was no normal Dutch language transmission from parents to children. Dutch children in South Africa were reared predominantly by slave/servant women who did not speak this language but, instead, they used their own mother tongues, probably Portuguese Creole and a broken version of Dutch. In consequence, what children heard was "a form of speech with Dutch vocabulary" (Thomason and Kaufman 1988: 252). As far as the structure of Afrikaans is concerned,[3] it resembles Dutch but linguists

---

[2] Original italics.

[3] This information is based on Thomason and Kaufman (253–254) who rely on other sources.

have noted a few oddities: Afrikaans makes use of double negation, simplified morphology or nasal vowels. Mark Sebba (1997) adds that "[t]he simplification shown by Afrikaans in its grammar is the sort which typifies creoles; however, Afrikaans grammar is complex in other ways which make it similar to Dutch but unlike other creoles."

To resolve the problem of a typological category for Afrikaans, it has been suggested that this language, although having a few features (including those social ones that usually determine the emergence of a creolised language) which are attributed to creoles, is not a creole. Instead, researchers have proposed the term *creoloid* for such linguistic phenomena which are not full creoles but which have creole-like features.

3.2. Creoloids and the typology of contact languages

Owing to the fact that languages which are termed *creoloids* are neither pidgins/ creoles nor bilingual-mixed languages, in my opinion there is a need to classify them as a separate category of contact languages. There are a few reasons why I believe an additional typological category should be established.

First of all, creoloids are languages which evidently emerge as a result of contacts between speakers of different languages. This is well observable in grammatical and lexical structure of creoloids. They share a number of features with their lexifier languages and creoles based on those lexifier languages; however, they also vary to quite a high degree from their superstrates. A good case in point may be Singlish or Isleño Spanish – a language used in Louisiana in Isleño community (cf. Coles 2008).

Furthermore, I would object to regarding Singlish or Afrikaans as merely atypical varieties of English or Dutch respectively. This is so because they are more like creoles which have rarely been considered forms of English or Dutch, but which are typically classified as separate languages.

The next factor which makes me postulate this category of contact languages is that if creoloids do not fit the categories of pidgins, creoles or bilingual-mixed languages, they must be something else. A separate category, from my point of view, would simplify the problem of classifying such languages.

Finally, I presume that in the near future we might witness the emergence of new languages which will be the examples of neither pidgins/creoles nor bilingual-mixed languages. A good case in point might be the Polish language as spoken in English-speaking countries (i.e. Polglish or Ponglish). Some may deem it to be a broken, heavily anglicised, version of the standard variety of Polish, but I think this language might be a totally new linguistic entity which, in this case, I would call a creoloid. What should be emphasised, however, is the fact that Polglish has not yet been fully researched and what is known about this variety is mostly based on anecdotal references found on the Internet or in some newspapers (cf. Arendt

2003, Connolly 2000, Sobkowiak 2008).[4] Such words as: "owertajm", "pejslip", "tajming" and many more are quoted nowadays to shed some light on the funniness of Polglish, but I am of the opinion that this language variety deserves a more serious study in order to discover its structure, recognise the formation mechanisms and determine its status.

4. Conclusion

Sarah G. Thomason claims that pidgins, creoles and bilingual mixed-languages are cases of "extreme language mixture" (Thomason 2001: 60). Pidgins are languages with no native speakers and when a new generation of pidgin-speakers is born, then this pidgin evolves into a creole because it begins to be used as a mother tongue. Apart from pidgins and creoles, which constitute very important categories of contact languages, there are bilingual-mixed languages. Being sometimes also referred to as intertwined languages, bilingual-mixed languages are true cases of language mixture. This mix, however, is not the result of the quest for a new, shared, means of mutual communication between speech communities of different linguistic background. The motivation for creating a bilingual-mixed language lies either in the fact that a given group needs a secret language or needs a language as a symbol of this group identity.

Another group of languages, which turn out to be very difficult for the typological classification of contact languages, is – in my view – the category of creoloids. They are genuine cases of contact tongues which, in terms of grammar, lexicon and social conditions under which they arise, do not fit any of the three categories (i.e. pidgins, creoles, bilingual-mixed languages). I, therefore, reckon that they should constitute a separate typological category of contact languages.

References

Arends, J., P. Muysken, N. Smith, (eds). 1995. *Pidgins and Creoles. An Introduction*. Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Arendt, H. 2003. *Menace to the Polish Language*. http://www.lexicool.com/articles_005_arendt.asp

Bakker, P. 1997. *A Language of Our Own. The Genesis of Michif, the Mixed Cree-French Language of the Canadian Métis*. New York, Oxford: OUP.

Bakker, P. 2008 (forthcoming). "Pidgins versus Other Contact Languages." In: S. Kouwenberg, J. Singler (eds). *The Handbook of Pidgins and Creoles*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Bakker, P., P. Muysken, 1995. "Mixed languages and language intertwining.". In: J. Arends, P. Muysken, N. Smith (eds). *Pidgins and Creoles. An Introduction*. Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, pp. 41–52.

---

[4] I have not had access to any serious study of Polglish spoken by a Polish community in a foreign country.

Coles, F.A. 2008 (date of Internet access). *Creoloid Structures of the Isleňo Dialect of Spanish*. http://tell.fll.purdue.edu/RLA-Archive/1989/Linguistics-html/Coles-FF.htm

Connolly, K. 2000. "Poland's language police wage war on 'Polglish'." *The Guardian*, 04.09.2000. http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2000/sep/04/poland

De Rooij, V. 1995. "Variation." In: J. Arends, P. Muysken, N. Smith (eds). *Pidgins and Creoles. An Introduction*. Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, pp. 53–64.

Holm, J. 1988. *Pidgins and Creoles*. Cambridge: CUP.

Holm, J. 2000. *An Introduction to Pidgins and Creoles*. Cambridge: CUP.

McMahon, A.M.S. 1994. "Pidgins and Creoles." *Understanding Language Change.* Cambridge: CUP; pp. 253–283.

Mühlhäusler, P. 1997. *Pidgin and Creole Linguistics*. London: Westminster UP.

Platt J. 1975. „The Singapore English Speech Continuum and Its Basilect 'Singlish' as a 'Creoloid'." *Anthropological Linguistics* 17, pp. 363–374.

Platt, H., J. Platt 1975. *The Social Significance of Speech. An Introduction to and Workbook in Sociolinguistics*. Amsterdam, Oxford: North Holland Publishing Company, Ltd.

Romaine, S. 1994. "Pidgin and Creole Languages". *Language in Society. An Introduction to Sociolinguistics.* Oxford: OUP, pp. 163–190.

Romaine, S. 2000. *Pidgin and Creole Languages*. London, New York: Longman.

Sebba, M. 1997. *Contact Linguistics. Pidgins and Creoles*. Houndmills, London: Macmillan Press Ltd.

Sobkowiak, W. 2008 (date of Internet access). *The Polglish Dictionary*. http://ifa.amu.edu.pl/~swlodek/polgdict.htm

Swann, J., A. Deumert, T. Lillis, R. Mesthrie 2004. *A Dictionary of Sociolinguistics*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP.

Thomason, S.G. 2001. *Language Contact. An Introduction*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown UP.

Thomason, S.G., T. Kaufman 1988. *Language Contact, Creolization, and Genetic Linguistics*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: California UP.

Zhiming, B. 2008 (date of Internet access). *The Origins of Empty Categories in Singapore English*. http://www.eastling.org/paper/baozhiming_Gap.doc.